

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. An electronic message retrieval system comprising:

a sender operable to encrypt and transmit an electronic message, directed to a specified recipient, over a transmission medium;

a message retrieval device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message and provide an alarm message indicating receipt of the encrypted electronic message by the message retrieval device;

a secondary device operable to receive the alarm message from said message retrieval device and provide a secret password to said message retrieval device to initiate decryption of the encrypted electronic message,

wherein said message retrieval device is further operable to convert the format of the decrypted electronic message into a format different from a format of the encrypted electronic message and transmit the converted decrypted electronic message to a device compatible to receive communications in the different format.

2. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the different format includes, an audible format, a facsimile format, and a text format.

3. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 1, wherein said message retrieval device comprises:

a converter device operable to convert the format of the decrypted electronic message into a format recognized by the secondary device; and

an output unit from which the converted decrypted electronic message is provided to the secondary device.

4. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 3, wherein said sender encrypts the electronic message in accordance with a specified electronic key and said message retrieval device decrypts the encrypted electronic message using said specified electronic key.

5. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 1, further comprising:

a password transmission unit operable to transmit a password to said specified recipient.

6. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 5, further comprising:

a password transmission path through which the secret password is transmitted to said recipient; and

a message transmission path, different from said password transmission path, through which said decrypted electronic message is provided to the recipient.

7. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 6, wherein said password is generated by the sender and communicated to the password transmission unit in a message different from the encrypted electronic message.

8. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 1, wherein said transmission medium is the Internet.

9. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 1, wherein said encrypted electronic message comprises an indication as to whether the encrypted electronic message can be converted into a different format.

10. An electronic message retrieval system comprising:

a sender operable to encrypt and transmit an electronic message directed to a specified recipient;

a message retrieval device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message and provide an alarm message to a secondary device when the encrypted electronic message is received by the message retrieval device, wherein said secondary device is operable to receive messages in a format different from the format of the encrypted electronic message, said message retrieval device comprising;

a converter device operable to convert the encrypted electronic message into a format recognized by the secondary device; and

a decryption device operable to decrypt the encrypted electronic message upon receipt of a password;

said electronic message retrieval system further comprising;

a secure device operable to receive and decrypt the encrypted electronic message, wherein said secure device is operable to receive messages in the same format as the format of the encrypted electronic message.

11. An electronic message retrieval method comprising:

in response to receiving an encrypted electronic message, alerting, with an alarm, a recipient of the receipt of the encrypted electronic message;

determining, based on summary information about the encrypted electronic message whether to open the encrypted electronic message and whether to have the encrypted electronic message converted into a format different than the format the encrypted electronic message is currently in.

12. An electronic message retrieval method as claimed in claim 11, further comprising:

providing a password to a message retrieving device of the recipient to render the message retrieving device operable to decrypt the encrypted electronic message, and

converting the encrypted electronic message into a format compatible with a secondary device from a format which is incompatible with the secondary device.

13. An electronic message retrieval method as claimed in claim 11, further comprising:

indicating to said recipient whether the encrypted electronic message can be converted into a format compatible with a secondary device from a format which is incompatible with the secondary device.

14. An electronic message retrieval method comprising:

sending an encrypted electronic message over a communication network to a recipient's message retrieving device;

alerting, with an alarm, a recipient of the receipt of the encrypted electronic message;

determining, based on summary information included in the alarm, whether to defer retrieval of the encrypted electronic message or retrieve the encrypted electronic message immediately; and

if it is determined that retrieval of the encrypted electronic message is to be deferred, receiving and decrypting said encrypted electronic message on a secure machine; or

if it is determined that retrieval of the encrypted electronic message is to be performed immediately, providing a password to the recipient's message retrieving device to render the recipient's message retrieving device operable to decrypt the encrypted electronic message, and converting the encrypted electronic message into a format compatible with a secondary device from a format which is incompatible with the secondary device.

15. An electronic message retrieval system comprising:

a sender operable to encrypt and transmit an electronic message over a communication network directed to a specified recipient;

a message retrieval device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message and provide an alarm message to a secondary device when the encrypted electronic message is received by the message retrieval device;

a proxy device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message from the message retrieval device when the recipient provides a proxy instruction to said message retrieval device and operable to decrypt and transmit a decrypted electronic message to said recipient when the recipient provides a password to said proxy device.

16. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 3, further comprising:

a secure device operable to receive and decrypt the encrypted electronic message, wherein said secure device is operable to receive messages in the same format as the format of the encrypted electronic message.

17. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 3, wherein said encryption is performed by the sender using a publicly accessible key associated with the recipient.

18. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 15, wherein said proxy decrypts said encrypted electronic message by using a private key securely stored on said proxy.

19. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 3, wherein said secondary device is operable to receive messages in a format different from the format of the encrypted electronic message.

20. An electronic message retrieval system as claimed in claim 15, said proxy device comprising:

a converter device operable to convert the encrypted electronic message into a format recognized by the secondary device; and

a decryption device operable to decrypt an encrypted private key associated with the recipient and also decrypt the encrypted electronic message, wherein the decryption device is activated upon receipt of a password.

21. An electronic message retrieval system comprising:

a sender operable to encrypt and transmit an electronic message over a communication network directed to a specified recipient, wherein said encryption is performed using a publicly accessible key associated with the recipient;

a message retrieval device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message and provide an alarm message to a secondary device when the encrypted electronic message is

received by the message retrieval device, wherein said secondary device is operable to receive messages in a format different from the format of the encrypted electronic message;

a proxy device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message from the message retrieval device when the recipient provides a proxy instruction, said proxy device comprising;

a converter device operable to convert the encrypted electronic message into a format recognized by the secondary device; and

a decryption device operable to decrypt an encrypted private key associated with the recipient and also decrypt the encrypted electronic message, wherein the decryption device is activated upon receipt of a password;

said electronic message retrieval system further comprising;

a secure device operable to receive and decrypt the encrypted electronic message, wherein said secure device is operable to receive messages in the same format as the format of the encrypted electronic message.

22. An electronic message retrieval system in accordance with claim 21, further comprising a third party authority operable to receive said encrypted electronic message from said proxy device and decrypt the encrypted electronic message using a public key corresponding to said proxy device.

23. An electronic message retrieval system in accordance with claim 22 wherein said third party authority is located in a legal jurisdiction other than a legal jurisdiction in which said recipient is located.

24. An electronic message retrieval system in accordance with claim 22 wherein said third party authority is operable to receive a reference designation corresponding to said encrypted electronic message along with said encrypted electronic message.

25. An electronic message retrieval system in accordance with claim 24 wherein said third party authority is operable to receive said reference designation corresponding to said encrypted electronic message from said specified recipient and said decryption of said encrypted electronic message is controlled in accordance with the reference designation received from said specified recipient.

26. An electronic message retrieval method comprising:

sending an encrypted electronic message over a communication network to a recipient's message retrieving device, wherein said encryption is performed using a publicly accessible key associated with the recipient;

alerting the recipient, with an alarm, of the receipt of the encrypted electronic message;

determining, based on summary information included in the alarm, whether to defer retrieval of the encrypted electronic message or retrieve the encrypted electronic message immediately; and

if it is determined that retrieval of the encrypted electronic message is to be deferred, receiving and decrypting said encrypted electronic message on a secure machine; or

if it is determined that retrieval of the encrypted electronic message is to be performed immediately, providing a password to a proxy device;

decrypting, in said proxy device, a private encrypted key associated with the recipient to render the proxy operable to decrypt the encrypted electronic message; and

converting the encrypted electronic message into a format compatible with a secondary device from a format which is incompatible with the secondary device.

27. An electronic message retrieval system comprising:

a sender operable to encrypt and transmit an electronic message over a communication network directed to a specified recipient, wherein said encryption is performed using one of a plurality of publicly accessible keys associated with the recipient;

a message retrieval device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message and provide an alarm message to a secondary device when the encrypted electronic message is received by the message retrieval device, wherein said secondary device is operable to receive messages in a format different from the format of the encrypted electronic message;

a proxy device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message from the message retrieval device when the recipient provides a proxy instruction, said proxy device comprising;

a converter device operable to convert the encrypted electronic message into a format recognized by the secondary device; and

a decryption device operable to decrypt a plurality of encrypted private keys associated with the recipient and also decrypt the encrypted electronic message, wherein the decryption device is activated upon receipt of one of a plurality of passwords respectively associated with said encrypted private keys;

said electronic message retrieval system further comprising;

a secure device operable to receive and decrypt the encrypted electronic message, wherein said secure device is operable to receive messages in the same format as the format of the encrypted electronic message.

28. An electronic message retrieval method comprising:

sending an encrypted electronic message over a communication network to a recipient's message retrieving device, wherein said encryption is performed using one of a plurality of publicly accessible keys associated with the recipient;

alerting the recipient, with an alarm, of the receipt of the encrypted electronic message;

determining, based on summary information included in the alarm, whether to defer retrieval of the encrypted electronic message or retrieve the encrypted electronic message immediately; and

if it is determined that retrieval of the encrypted electronic message is to be deferred, receiving and decrypting said encrypted electronic message on a secure machine; or

if it is determined that retrieval of the encrypted electronic message is to be performed immediately, providing one of a plurality of passwords to a proxy device, said provided password being associated with the publicly accessible key used to encrypt the message;

decrypting, in said proxy device and upon receipt of said password, a private encrypted key associated with the publicly accessible key used to encrypt the message to render the proxy operable to decrypt the encrypted electronic message; and

converting the encrypted electronic message into a format compatible with a secondary device from a format which is incompatible with the secondary device.

29. An electronic message retrieval system comprising:

a sender operable to encrypt and transmit an electronic message, directed to a specified recipient, over a transmission medium;

a message retrieval device operable to receive the encrypted electronic message and provide an alarm message to a secondary device indicating that the encrypted electronic message has been received by the message retrieval device;

a message retrieval device operable to receive an alternate version of said encrypted electronic message, wherein said alternate version of said encrypted message is in a format different from a format of the encrypted electronic message.

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